

A putative church at Aqaba: A Space Syntax analysis

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Abstract

There are various theories about the origins of Christian religious architecture. Evolution in ecclesiastical buildings respects regional diversity in architectural and liturgical patterns. The mud-brick structure at modern Aqaba, Jordan (ancient Roman Aila) is such an example. Its architecture and artifacts, matched with liturgical textual traditions, suggest a transitional pre-Constantinian church. Space Syntax Analysis affirms the hypothesis of an ecclesiastical structure, and presents a piece of positive evidence to the jigsaw of archaeological investigation. This presentation examines these liturgical sources, architectural and artifactual evidence, and spatial configurations for the putative church structure.

The mud-brick structure was built on select Nabataean foundations in the mid- to late third century. Its placement in the urban environment of Aila, eastward orientation, overall spatial configuration, artifacts (glass oil lamp fragments, altar offering table, etc.), and a possible burial cut lend credence to its identification as a church. The complex underwent three distinct phases, possibly beginning as early as the mid-third century. The structure was expanded ca. 290, coincident with the arrival of the Roman Tenth Legion. A further expansion, perhaps ca. 325, added a possible baptistery and apsidal modifications. The building's destruction in the late fourth century, perhaps as a result of the earthquake of May 19, 363, is securely dated by numerous coins of Constantius II and imported African Red Slip pottery. The Christian community probably relocated to a new location within the new Byzantine city wall erected shortly afterwards near the old site

This mud-brick structure could be a significant example of the evolving Christian community's architecture bracketing the pre- and post-Constantinian periods.

Keywords

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